

Testimony Submitted to the Appropriations Committee:

H.B. No. 6824: An Act Concerning The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June Thirtieth 2017, And Making Appropriations Therefor And Other Provisions Related To Revenue.

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Senator Bye, Representative Walker and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Robert Lambert and I am the President and Executive Director of Connecticut Counseling Centers, Inc. We are a nonprofit community based behavioral healthcare agency with treatment centers in Danbury, Norwalk, and Waterbury and are members of the Connecticut Community Providers Association (CCPA) and the Connecticut Association of Nonprofits (CT Nonprofits).

I would like to share my concerns with H.B. 6824, “An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June Thirtieth 2017, and Making Appropriations Therefor and Other Provisions Related to Revenue”. In particular, I wanted to express my sincere concerns regarding the proposed cuts in Medicaid provider rates and the rescissions to Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services grant funding. The resulting reduction in revenue for nonprofit providers would threaten critical services to individuals and families in our service area including those struggling with narcotic addiction.

Connecticut Counseling Centers, Inc. is an accredited, multi-modality outpatient substance abuse and mental health agency licensed by the Department of Public Health serving the greater Danbury, Norwalk, and Waterbury areas. The agency has been in continuous operation since July 1, 1984. We provide a wide variety of treatment services for substance use and mental health disorders including Methadone Maintenance Treatment Programs which are specifically designed for the treatment of opioid use disorders. The treatment programs utilize evidence-based counseling services and the medication methadone sulfate to treat adults suffering from opioid dependency such as prescription narcotic and heroin addiction. Annually, these programs serve approximately 2000 opioid addicted adults from 69 CT communities. On any given day,

over 1400 patients are accessing this life saving treatment, the majority of which are insured by Medicaid.

It has been well documented that Connecticut is in the midst of a prescription narcotic and heroin epidemic. Last summer Connecticut's U.S. senators Chris Murphy and Richard Blumenthal called for more resources, including financial, to address the growing heroin epidemic in the state and across the nation. According to U.S. Sen. Chris Murphy, "It's time for the federal government to partner with local government and do something about it". There has been a dramatic rise in heroin-related deaths in Connecticut since 2012. Heroin-overdose deaths in the state rose to 257 in 2013, as compared to 174 in 2012. Heroin use is not just an inner city problem. It has spread into our suburbs and small towns (CT Post, "Call to Battle Connecticut's Heroin Epidemic", 3/17/14).

Medication assisted treatment programs such as Methadone Maintenance Treatment Programs are the only outpatient evidence-based treatment programs in Connecticut that are specifically designed to treat prescription narcotic and heroin addiction. Research demonstrates that Medication Assisted Treatment such as Methadone Treatment is the most effective form of treatment for narcotic addiction. It has been proven to reduce crime, increase employment, reduce healthcare costs, and help recovering addicts become productive members of society. Further, it has been shown to be among the most cost-effective, yielding savings of \$3.00 to \$4.00 for every \$1.00 spent (SAMHSA, 2005). In response to the opioid epidemic, Connecticut Counseling Centers, Inc. has been increasing the number of treatment slots by 5% - 10% per year despite repeated funding cuts during the last three (3) years. However, we are now at the breaking point. The Governor's proposed budget includes both cuts in Medicaid billing rates for healthcare providers and continued Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services grant funding rescissions for the next two years. A reduction in Medicaid reimbursement rates coupled with continued decreases in Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services grant funding will not only create a barrier to expanding access to care, but will decrease the ability of the narcotic addicted to access this life-saving treatment. The extent of this decrease in current capacity would depend on the degree to which our Medicaid rates are cut.

At a time of historic increases in the prevalence of opioid dependence in Connecticut, we believe it would be ill-advised to create a barrier to the ability of methadone maintenance treatment program providers to address this epidemic by providing treatment for those suffering with this fatal disease. We respectfully ask the appropriations committee to consider this and ensure that the Medicaid rates for treatment providers are not cut.

Further, the entire behavioral healthcare system in Connecticut is deteriorating. The proposed cuts, coupled with four rounds of rescissions/budget modification dating back to late 2012, have put enormous pressure on an already severely depleted treatment system. A number of community based mental health providers have downsized or closed outpatient services due to inadequate Medicaid rates that have not kept pace with inflation. The reality is that nonprofit behavioral healthcare providers have been pushed to the breaking point due to the lack of investment over the past two decades. Cutting Medicaid provider rates at this time would threaten the sustainability of the entire treatment system.

As members of the Appropriations Committee work toward creating your 'Recommended Budget' for SFY16 and 17, I urge you to restore these harmful cuts to ensure critical programs and services are available to the residents of Connecticut. I'd also like to respectfully remind you that investing in the nonprofit sector will improve service delivery, increase economic activity, and save taxpayer money, and ensure access to efficient, cost-effective, and high-quality services in our communities that Connecticut families depend on.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions, or for additional information.

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